

Saint Clement's Church,  
The Rev'd. Charles Neale Field, SSJE,  
& The Guild of the Iron Cross

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Research Paper

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The Feast of St. Nicholas

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*Thy Kingdom come, O God*

*Thy reign on earth begin*

*Break with thine iron rod*

*The tyrannies of sin.*

Office Hymn of The Guild of the Iron Cross

In August 1883 a group of unnamed working class men, living in the Logan Square neighborhood of Philadelphia, met with an assisting priest at St. Clement's Episcopal Church, and "requested him to form them into a Society, in which they might join against Intemperance, Blasphemy and Impurity" (*Year Book* 1884 11). The priest was Fr. Charles Neale Field, SSJE, and the organization they founded was the Guild of the Iron Cross. By Easter of the following year the Guild had twenty-six full members and six honorary ones, men interested in the goals of the Guild but not involved in manual labor (*Ibid.*). The Guild quickly spread throughout the East Coast. Three years later, in 1887, it boasted five Episcopal Bishops enrolled as honorary chaplains, more than 100 of the

most prominent Episcopal clergymen as active chaplains, and over 10,000 laymen and youths enrolled as members (*New York Times*, May 1887). Despite its initial success, by 1900 we find no further mention of the Guild. On a national level and even within its own founding parish of Saint Clement's, the Guild of the Iron Cross ceased to function. What might explain the meteoric rise of the Guild, and then only seventeen years later its quiet and complete death?

St. Clement's Episcopal Church was chartered in September 1855. The cornerstone of the building was laid seven months later at the corner of Twentieth and Cherry Streets. In 1855 the area around Logan Square was almost rural. Construction had begun on the Roman Catholic Cathedral in 1846 but it was still ten years away from completion. West of the Square, the city's grid layout was only theoretical, and the newly founded St. Clement's was surrounded by open fields. Developer William Wilson had great plans for a residential neighborhood of stately brownstones centered around the church and gave land for its construction. But as the city moved westward many small factories were built in the open areas between the church and the Schuylkill River. These in turn brought working class families, and more modest structures to house them. In 1881 the Pennsylvania Railroad constructed its new terminal just to the west of City Hall and built a stone viaduct to bring trains into the city. This "Chinese Wall" ran just to the south of Saint Clement's and further reduced the desirability of the neighborhood.

It is difficult to discuss any facet of the history, work, and influence of St. Clement's Parish without some discussion of the Oxford Movement/Anglo-Catholic tradition and its controversies with the High, Broad, and Low Church parties within the

Church of England and her American daughter, the Episcopal Church. The outwardly visible aspect of the controversy concerned ritual. David Contosta outlines this nicely in his 2006 history of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Chestnut Hill:

The Low Church denounced what they saw as Roman influences and fought to retain the Protestant side of the Anglican faith. For them, such things as surplices, candles on the Altar, and robed choirs were all signs of a drift towards Rome. In Philadelphia there was an almost equal balance between the High Church and Low Church parties, with Evangelicals having a slight edge. Local High Church advocates emphasized the primacy of the Sacraments and the Book of Common Prayer, while the Low Church emphasized the Bible, Morning Prayer and preaching" (Contosta 19).

In reality most of Philadelphia's Episcopal parishes fell somewhere between these two parties, in a third group generally described as Broad Church. Contosta continues,

Outside of either group were a few Anglo-Catholics, who observed "Catholic" practices not authorized by the Prayer Book. The best example of this in Philadelphia was St. Clement's on 20<sup>th</sup> Street between Arch and Cherry, where rectors openly defied several bishops who ordered them to stop their "illegal" liturgies (Ibid.).

Liturgical practices were only the outward sign of catholic spirituality. Both High and Low Churchmen subscribed to Luther's teachings on the "Depravity of Man", and many Low Churchmen held Calvinist beliefs regarding predestination and election. As a result,

each group tended to believe that God rewarded righteousness with prosperity, and that the poor were generally so because of some moral failing on their own part. The Anglo-Catholics held very different beliefs regarding poverty and human suffering. They believed that the Church was called upon to help the poor, and that all men could, with proper attention and care, be regenerated.

Unlike her Anglo-Catholic sister parish St. Mark's on Locust Street, St. Clement's was founded as a typical Broad church parish. Only after struggling through a decade of economic troubles and a series of short stayed and ecclesiastically broad rectors did a shift in churchmanship begin to take place. In March 1869, the vestry of St. Clement's called The Rev'd Herman G. Batterson, a well-known proponent of the Oxford Movement, to be their new rector. From the start Batterson's teaching reflected the social consciousness present in Anglo-Catholicism. In the November, 1869 issue of the monthly *Parish Guide* he writes, "It is important to the life of any parish that the men have some organization for work, some system by which they can render more efficient the work in the schools, and among the poor of the parish." (*S.C. Parish Guide* Nov '69 2) Later in the same issue he writes, "There is work to be done in the care of God's poor; work to be done by all... Every member of the parish should feel this responsibility, and ever regard it as intensely personal... Do not feel that when... worship is over that your work for the week is done. Worship is a part but not the whole of Christian duty." (*Ibid.* 3)

As rector, Rev'd Batterson was followed by the Rev'd Theodore M. Riley, a graduate of the Anglo-Catholic Seminary, Nashotah House, whose correspondences with the Bishop of Pennsylvania over the continued and advancing uses of catholic ceremonial

at St. Clement's are notorious. At Easter 1874, Rev'd Riley invited two young priests from the English House the Society of Saint John the Evangelist (SSJE), often referred to as the Cowley Fathers, to preach a mission at St. Clement's. The Cowley Fathers, founded in 1865 by Richard Meaux Benson, vicar of Cowley, near Oxford, were the first religious order in the Church of England since the reformation (Rowell 448). The Society's express mission was to "promote catholic ritual and ceremonial" (Ibid. 447). It worked for a closer relationship with the Eastern Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches, and was a highly vocal critic of the Broad Church Party in the Church of England. Unlike the more Lutheran inclined Broad Churchmen and Calvinistic Evangelicals in the Church of England and American Episcopal Church, the Anglo-Catholics saw good in all people and as a consequence encompassed a strong social mission into their work. This social interest is exemplified in the life and writings of Fr. Charles Grafton SSJE, the cofounder of the Society. Grafton, originally from Boston, had moved to England in 1864, where he "served as chaplain of a hospital for Cholera patients in London's impoverished West End" (Hein 208). In his 1914 book, *A Journey Godward*, Grafton wrote, "Our nature is not as Luther taught, totally depraved. It is a good, though an injured one. In every soul there shines a light from heaven" (qtd. in Rowell 477). The response to the Society's mission in Philadelphia was overwhelming and the visitors preached to standing room crowds. (need reference). Further visits took place and in 1876 the vestry of St. Clement's invited the Cowley Fathers to take over the Parish. The Society sent Father Oliver S. Prescott SSJE, to be the new Rector. He was to serve from 1876 to 1881. Father Prescott was an American, originally from Massachusetts, who had the distinction of

being, in 1851, the only American Episcopal cleric to stand trial for heresy based on his use of catholic ritual (De Mille 291).

In 1872, the Cowley Fathers had founded a religious house in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to further the work of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist on this continent. In 1882 Fr. Prescott moved to the Cambridge house, and his place was taken by Fr. Basil Maturin SSJE. Maturin was a dynamic preacher and organizer who was to lead St. Clement's until 1889. During his seven years he brought many young and energetic SSJE clergymen from England to assist in his work. He re-ordered the nave, built a Chapel and Clergy House, and continued the development of catholic ritual and spirituality in the parish. Aural confession was officially instituted and confessionals built, and a shrine to the Blessed Virgin was installed. By 1883, St. Clement's was described as having, "the most advanced ritual of any church in the city...the services are largely attended" (Scharf 1356).

One of the young curates whom Maturin chose to assist him in Philadelphia was Charles Neale Field. Fr. Field was born in 1849 in Reading, England, where his own father was an Anglican Priest and prison reformer (Rea 2). The younger Field took holy orders in 1872; during his service as an assistant priest he was well known for his interest in and work with the poor, especially workingmen and boys (Ibid.). This enthusiasm led to conflicts with the middleclass members of his parish, and in 1876 he joined the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, hoping to find a more congenial environment for his work. In 1882 he was sent to Philadelphia where he was aptly placed to continue his important mission.

The Guild of the Iron Cross was formed in the summer of 1883, but exactly who prompted its formation is open to question. Summers in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Philadelphia were a dangerous time. Yellow fever was endemic, and the more affluent parishioners left for the shore, the mountains, or houses in the country. With any free time that upper, and middleclass men found, they also tended to flee the city to join their families. As a result, vestry meeting were rarely held during the summer months. The first mention of the Guild is in an undated letter from Fr. Field to his superior in Cowley, Fr. Benson, written sometime in the early summer of 1883: "I am hoping to do a good deal of work among working men during the summer and have a meeting of them on Thursday evening to consider the formation of a 'Guild of the Iron Cross'--a sort of crusade against Blasphemy, Impurity and Intemperance among working men themselves." (qtd. in Rea) The first dated mention is from July 27<sup>th</sup> of that year, when Fr. Field, left in charge of the parish, sent a post card to Fr. Maturin who was away in Oxford. "We had another meeting of the Iron Cross last night (50 present) Subject: 'Vice and how to overcome it.'" (qtd. in Rea) The first official mention of the Guild in a Parish document is in a small publication, *Year Book of Church Work in St. Clement's Parish, Philadelphia – Easter 1884*, which states in full, the following:

The Guild of the Iron Cross.

During August of 1883 a few workingmen met one of the Clergy of the Church, and requested him to form them into a Society, in which they might join against Intemperance, Blasphemy and Impurity. Accordingly the Guild of the Iron Cross was instituted, and is working vigorously. The



rule is simple, the pledge is definite and the work abundant. The members must be men who work with their hands, and must promise to say the prayer of the Guild daily, with morning and evening prayer, to read the pledge each Sunday, and to return their card to inform the Chaplain, when the pledge has been broken. The pledge is as follows: - I pledge myself to resist the sin of intemperance, and will use my influence to prevent the commission of this sin by others. I pledge myself to resist the sin of Blasphemy, to honor God's name and bless my fellow-men. I pledge myself to resist the sin of impurity in thought, word or deed and to use my influence to draw others from evil talking and immoral living.

The members are at present twenty-six in number. Those who do not work with their hands may be admitted to honorary membership, and of those there are now six.

Workingmen who do not wish to become members may be associates, by signing the pledge, and hanging it in their houses. Each member of the Guild is provided with pledges for distribution and keeps the roll of associates he secures.

There are no dues, but collections are taken at each meeting for defraying the expenses of the Guild.

Officers:

President,      The Rev. B.W. Maturin.

Chaplain,      The Rev. C. N. Field.

Treasurer, Mr. G. E. Fryer.

Secretary, Mr. H. H. Bonnell.

(Year Book 1884 11)

It seems very clear that although this record states that the Guild was inspired by the workingmen themselves, earlier plans for the Guild were outlined and communicated by Field to both his Rector and his Order's Superior. Perhaps humility or propriety on the part of Field led to this misrepresentation in published accounts.

Whatever the exact date or situation of its founding, the Guild's growth was phenomenal, from Twenty-six members solely within St. Clement's in 1884 to over 10,000 men spread though out the East Coast, the Midwest, and Texas in 1887(*New York Times* May 1887). Records of the Guild from 1884 to 1887 are frustrating lacking, but by 1887 the Guild was publishing a monthly newsletter and had developed an organized structure of 13 member branches, wards, initiation rituals, badges, and chaplains. A regular printing operation was established at St. Clement's to meet the needs of the Guild, at an annual cost of \$1000.00 (*S.C. Magazine* Apr 1887 10) Beginning in 1887 an annual Iron Cross Festival was held on January 25<sup>th</sup>, the Feast of St. Paul. The first such festival held at St. Augustine's Hall in New York (*NYT* May 1887). In 1888 the festival was held with a full day of celebrations in Philadelphia, starting at 11 a.m. at St. Mark's, Locust Street, followed by lunch, afternoon meetings, Choral Evensong at St. Clement's with two choirs and a guest preacher, the Bishop of Mississippi. The day concluded with a supper (*I. C. Fest. S.C. Mag* Jan 1888 4). In February it was reported that 300 Guild members attended the lunch, 400 the supper and the Evensong proved so

popular that admission had to be restricted to actual guild members (*I. C. Fest. Reviewed S.C. Mag.* Feb 1888, 8).

The four years 1887 through 1890 seem to be the golden years of the Guild. The Parish magazine is full of its activities. Evening lectures on art, Christian history, and religion were given on a monthly basis; November 1888, for instance, featured a lecture on the Catacombs of Rome (*S.C. Mag.* Nov 1888 15). In 1888 the Guild, now with 390 members at St. Clement's itself, and nearly 700 in Philadelphia and Camden, undertook the job of providing burial for "Christians who die without friends in the Almshouse of West Philadelphia and to provide mourners to follow them to the grave (*S.C. Mag.* Dec 1888 12). In a time when child labor was common, many of the "workingmen" associated with the Guild were undoubtedly quite young. In 1887 the Guild began to undertake work specifically geared to boy and youths; "Iron Cross Excursions for working boys on Saturday half holidays have been a great success, there have been five excursions – 75 boys on the Boys' Iron Cross register (*S.C. Mag.* Sep 1888 10), "Boys' Iron Cross meeting to learn singing each Wednesday evening (*S.C. Mag.* Nov 1888 15).

The Guild of the Iron Cross was just one of many such activities at St. Clement's. In the parish yearly review for 1887 we read of the several practical guilds; The Altar Guild, responsible for caring for vestments and arranging the Altar for service; The Ladies Guild of Saint Martha, which provided meals and refreshment as necessary; The Guild of St. Vincent, to train and organize Altar servers; The Choral Guild of Sts. Michael and All Angels. Women's Devotional Guilds; Guild of the Holy Cross, Guild of St. Mary, and the Guild of the Christ Child, and men's devotional guilds, the Guild of St.

John, and the Guild of St. Christopher. The Parish maintained a Hospital for those suffering from Tuberculosis, as well as a Dispensary for the poor, which in 1887 served 1350 patients who made 3611 visits. Two convents were associated with the church and served by its clergy. There were multiple daily Masses and prayer services. Sundays alone often saw 6 Masses beginning at 5:00 a.m. for those engaged in domestic service (*S.C. Mag Apr* 1888 9). There was never enough money to meet the Church's needs, and pleas for donations punctuate every issue of the parish magazine. Even with a clergy house staffed by 5 or 6 unmarried priests, and roughly two dozen sisters in the associated convents, the demands upon all the clergy's time, and especially that of the rector must have been immense.

While there is little mention of Fr. Field's direct Guild involvement in the parish magazine and the vestry minutes from this era are not extant, it does seem clear that he played a vital role in the continued development of the Guild. Fr. Field spent June and July of 1888 in England, and upon his return in August the Guild of the Iron Cross hosted a celebration. Over 100 members attended the sit down dinner where speeches and commendations lasted long into the night (*S.C. Mag. Sep* 1888 8). Shortly after Field's return to Philadelphia, St. Clement's rector Fr. Maturin left for England, leaving Fr. Field in charge. Maturin had been suffering from exhaustion and had tried to resign from his position several times in the previous three years. Now back in Oxford, Maturin's short trip stretched out through the winter and into the spring. In April 1889, St. Clement's vestry received notice that Fr. Maturin would not be returning. Fr. Field was given full charge of the parish but not named rector (*S.C. Mag. Apr.* 1889 4).

The growth and work of the Guild continued unabated. In December 1888, the Church took out a lease on a property at the Southeast corner of 21<sup>st</sup> and Market Streets. "By the time of this publication the Iron Cross Parlor and Gymnasium... will have opened. Spacious and well appointed, it is fitted with the best athletic equipment and an elegantly parlor with a view to comfort for reading, games, writing or quiet conversation" (*S.C. Mag.* Jan 1889 10). "The Iron Cross Parlor and Gymnasium... supplies a great need and has already been remarkably successful. The 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the building has been taken in order to provide more room for the crowd of boys. We need ladies to take charge of the parlor on boys' nights to teach them games, music, etc. apply to Fr. Field (*S.C. Mag.* Feb 1889 11). At the same time the Guild expanded its mission as an Employment Bureau:

One of the most difficult things is to find employment for good worthy men when they are out of work, and applications are so often made to us that it is better to try to do this on businesslike principles. Any man having good references is invited to apply between 10 and 11 each morning at the Iron Cross Parlor, when all that can be done will be put in motion to secure him a position. Employers are requested to let the IC know of positions vacant, no fee will be charged (*Ibid.*).

The Iron Cross Parlor may have been a huge success but it was also a great expense. In the May 1889 Parish Report we read of the large 70 by 25 foot parlor on the first floor of the 21<sup>st</sup> street building with two floors of gymnasium above. Ladies of the parish staffed the parlor, with a steward and trainer to care for the upper two gymnasium

floors. "In winter the parlor opened each morning for men out of work, work and food was provided for some and they were thus saved from starvation" (*Parish Report*, May 1889). Five months into the project, "The Guild Chaplain, Fr. Field thanks all who have so kindly helped the men and boys of the guild... The expenses of the Iron Cross Parlor and Gymnasium have been about \$700.00 and the excursions about \$160.00, expenses for trainer, secretary, etc. about \$300.00" (*Ibid.*). In June the Parish Magazine contains an appeal for the Parlor and gymnasium help for the summer. (*S. C. Mag.* Jun 1889 10)

Through 1889 and 1890 Fr. Field continued as the priest in charge of St. Clement's Parish, as well as Chaplain of the Guild of the Iron Cross. On Friday, May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1889 a dam across the Little Conemaugh River 14 miles upstream from Johnstown, Pennsylvania failed. 20 million tons, 4.8 billion gallons of water rushed down upon the town. 2,209 people were killed, ninety-nine entire families died in the flood, including 396 children. One hundred twenty-four women and 198 men were widowed, 98 children were orphaned. One-third of the dead, 777 people, were never identified (need reference). As reported in the July 1889 Parish Magazine, upon learning of the flood, Fr. Field rushed to the site:

Fr. Field went up to Johnstown on the Monday after the calamity, acting as Chaplin to the Red Cross Society. He arrived at Johnstown on Wednesday and was for some days the only Priest of our Church in the city. He returned on the Saturday [June 8<sup>th</sup>] before Whitsunday to Philadelphia. After preaching on Sunday evening at S. Clement's, he went

back with Brother Maynard to Johnstown. He baptised nine persons in Johnstown, one a baby born at the time of the flood. (*S.C. Mag.* Jul 1889)

Fr. Field was in Johnstown through the second week in July even volunteering to adopt and take back to Philadelphia with him all of the orphaned children. (Fr. Field qtd in Rea)

Meanwhile in Philadelphia the work of the Guild continued. New Guild offices were opened across from St. Clement's on Cherry Street. The offices contained a shop to sell both the Guild's publications and other religious books deemed worthy. The Employment Bureau for Boys was moved from the Parlor location and a few rooms above the shop and office were rented furnished for \$1.00 a week. "This is likely to meet a great want and we have long needed a lodging house for young men near the church (*S.C. Mag.* Aug 1889 12). Through the summer an art exhibition and sale were planned for November 1889 with the express purpose of covering the expenses associated with the Iron Cross Parlor and Gymnasium through another winter. The exhibition was held in conjunction with the St. Clement's Day celebrations, November 25<sup>th</sup>.

The Art Exhibition at the Iron Cross rooms was a great success, and everyone was surprised at the beautiful collection of embroideries, pictures and curiosities. The weather was unpropitious, otherwise the financial success would have been equal to the merits of the exhibition. The expenses of the exhibition were very considerable, and the proceeds from the tickets were scarcely sufficient to cover them. Large numbers of tickets, were, however, given away, and on the one fine day the rooms

were crowded. It did not seem, to be understood that the pictures were for sale (*Parish Notes. S.C. Mag.* Dec 1889 2)

With no fanfare in December 1889, Fr. Field, who has been acting Rector since Fr. Maturin's departure for England, steps aside as acting rector to be replaced as official rector by his colleague Rev'd Convers (*S.C. Mag.* Dec 1889 1). The only refection of this change is Maturin's replacement as rector by Convers on church letterhead and notices. Fr. Field leaves for the month of January in 1890, and based on parish magazine notices, except for its printing operations, work of the Men's Guild of the Iron Cross at St. Clement's receives no mention, although the Boys' Iron Cross continues to operate, managed by ladies of the parish. On January 25<sup>th</sup> Fr. Convers sails for England expecting to return in March and Fields is reappointed acting Rector (*S.C. Mag.* Jan 1890 2). In April a letter of resignation arrived in Philadelphia from Fr. Convers. The vestry refused to accept it and Fr. Field was left in charge of the parish.

By March of 1891, Fr. Convers had not returned to Philadelphia, instead his doctors in England had sent him to Natal, South Africa, for an indefinite stay, ultimately he was never to leave Natal. Faced with the vacancies in Philadelphia and continued hostilities with Pennsylvania's Bishop, the Superior of the Cowley Fathers, Fr. Benson, decided to consolidate the Society's activity in Boston. In 1891, over the protests of the vestry and hundreds of St. Clement's members, Fr. Field, and 3 other members of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist left Philadelphia (*S.C. Mag.* Mar 1891 3).

Without Fr. Field and his SSJE colleagues, the Parish seems to have fallen apart. The Parish magazine was no longer published and other records are incomplete. St.

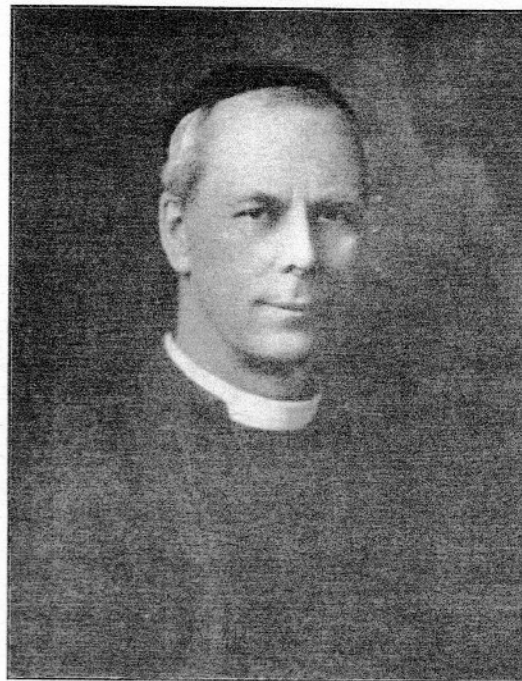


Clement's was without a rector until 1895 and in that 4 year period seems to have drawn in upon itself. While the Guild of the Iron Cross had spread across the country, its main focus and publishing arm were always based at St. Clement's. The women of the Parish kept the boys' Iron Cross programs running as best they could, and with the help of the All Saints Sisters of the Poor continued to operate the hospital and dispensary but conventions of the time meant that they could not work with the men's program. The workingmen themselves, who theoretically made up the active members of the guild, lacked the free time, the resources, and perhaps the organizational skills to keep the Guild of the Iron Cross going. More affluent male members of the Parish who could have helped were uninterested. The lease at the Iron Cross Parlor was not renewed and the Cherry Street property was converted to other uses. Perhaps local wards continued to exist outside of Philadelphia but by 1900 the Guild of the Iron Cross seems to disappear.

Sadly for St. Clement's, as a religious priest, Fr. Field was not his own master and had no choice in his move. He took up his new duties in Boston with the same skill, energy, and determination he had brought to Philadelphia. Assigned to a struggling African-American Parish, St. Augustine's in South Boston, he worked tirelessly with the poor and orphaned.

As would be expected with its origin firmly planted in the Anglo-Catholic Movement, the Guild of the Iron Cross had its religious goals: the encouragement of prayer, sacramental grace, and the exercise of corporal works of mercy. It also filled vital secular needs. It taught literacy to working class men, encouraged physical fitness,

lobbied for Saturday half-days to allow workers time for recreation, sought occupations for boys in the inner city, helped with the burial of the poor. A noble cause, and like so many noble causes in our troubled world, one that perhaps collapsed under the weight of its own success.



REV. CHARLES N. FIELD  
[who succeeds Bishop Osborne as American Provincial of  
the S. S. J. E.]

I pledge myself to resist the sin of blasphemy, to honor God's name and bless my fellow-men. I pledge myself to resist the sin of impurity in thought, word or deed, and to use my influence to draw others from evil talking and immoral living.

*The Pledge of the Guild of the Iron Cross*

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